

75 War Critics Leave Humphrey Books Talk

NEW YORK (AP) — Some 75 persons protesting the role of the United States in Vietnam walked out on a speech by Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey at the National Book Award ceremonies last night, but 1,000 other persons remained to give Humphrey a standing ovation.

Novelist Mitchell Goodman, one of those protesting, marched up to the stage of Philharmonic Hall, cupped his hands to his mouth, and shouted: "Mr. Vice President, we are burning children in Vietnam and you and we are all responsible!"

As the demonstrators left their seats, Humphrey, who appeared to be calm, told the audience: "This is what we mean by free speech. I've heard that Broadway shows sometimes lose their audience after the first night. I'm sorry to have lost part of our audience before we even began."

Others Boo Protesters

When the protest started, members of the National Book Committee sitting behind Humphrey on the stage appeared embarrassed. They smiled when applause drowned out shouts by the demonstrators.

(The demonstrators were booed as they left the hall, United Press International reported.)

Among those who walked out were several prominent authors and publishers, including Anthony West, literary critic of the New Yorker magazine; Richard Baron, president of Dial Press; Jules Feiffer, the cartoonist; Andre Schiffrin, editor in chief of Pantheon Press; Robert Gornham Davis, a literary critic; and Hans Koningsberger, an author.

Several authors had urged the walkout in private telephone calls made to colleagues and members of the publishing trade since last week.

Most of the demonstrators returned after Humphrey finished speaking.

Distribute Pamphlet

As the audience entered the hall, a pamphlet was distributed to them saying: "A number of those present will leave this room during the address of the vice president. They do not deem it suitable to listen to one of the highest officials of the United States government discuss the arts while this government is responsible for the ever-increasing death and destruction in the Vietnamese war."

The pamphlet bore the signatures of Aron Asher, an editor at Viking Press; Feiffer, Koningsberger, Dwight MacDonald, a critic; Dick Seaver, an editor at Grove Press, and Theodore Solotaroff, an editor with New American Library.

The vice president's address was an account of his own literary taste, with touches of humor thrown in.

He compared his preferences in books to those of Mark Twain. Quoting Twain, he said: "War talk by men who have been in a war is always interesting; whereas moon talk by a poet who has not been on the moon is likely to be dull."

Prefers Nonfiction

There was a burst of laughter when Humphrey told how his political career had influenced his preference for nonfiction.

He said: "For those who do prefer fiction, let me tell you that in the world of politics I find a great deal of it every day. And I can tell you in this regard that 'fiction, truth is a thousand times stranger than.'"

It was explained later that Humphrey used the construction, adapted from a Chinese proverb, for emphasis.

In a more serious vein, he condemned the censorship of books as harmful to a free society.